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# **Paradigm Debates and Marketing Theory, Thought and Practice: From the 1900s to the Present Day**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper provides a history of a number of intellectual debates in marketing theory and consumer research. It outlines the key arguments involved, highlights the politics and acrimoniousness that often accompanied the competition for academic prestige or practitioner remuneration. It weaves the contents of the special issue into its narrative.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This article engages in a broad historical survey of the history of marketing thought as it pertains to intellectual debate and disputation.

**Findings** – While scholars often articulate objectivity as an intellectual ideal, many of the debates that are explored reveal a degree of intellectual intolerance and this is refracted through the institutional system that structures marketing discourse.

**Originality/value** – This account provides an introduction to the intellectual debates of the last century, highlighting the ebb and flow of marketing thought. It calls attention to debates that are largely under explored and highlights the politics of knowledge production in marketing and consumer research.

**Keywords** – Paradigm, Paradigm Debate; Politics of Marketing Thought; Objectivity; Acrimoniousness

**Article Classification:** Research paper.

“Philosophy is not a single Good Thing that is bound to enrich human existence; it is a witches’ brew containing some rather deadly ingredients. Numerous assaults on life, liberty, and happiness have had a strong philosophical backing (Feyerabend, 1994, p. 10)”

## Introduction

In this paper we engage with the paradigm debates in marketing and consumer research. All research projects are framed through particular philosophical prisms even if we do not fully appreciate it. Generally speaking these are called paradigms or worldviews and are constituted by their own particular axiology (set of values), ontology (assumptions about the nature of reality), epistemology (theory of knowledge) and view of human nature. The assumptions we bring to our academic endeavours will shape the way we interpret the world and the place of marketing, consumers and consumption within it (e.g. Marsden and Littler, 1996, 1998).

A fairly uncontroversial position, then, is that the production and consumption of knowledge is irredeemably intellectual, social *and* political with personal biography, (self) interest and acrimony refracted through our publications (Brown, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2012; Desmond, 1995; Jones, 2012; Kavanagh, 2014). But just because we share paradigmatic perspectives does not imply identical interests and intellectual cooperation rather than conflict. This said, tensions can be productive (Bagozzi, 1992) in the sense that they alert the wider academic community to important debates like those between Hunt’s scientific realist stance and Anderson’s critical relativist position. Indeed, Shelby Hunt’s submission to the *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* (JHRM) included in this series of papers has been the motive force that led to this Special Issue. For that, we should be thankful.

For Brown (1996), one of the key benefits of the paradigm debates has been that they have raised the philosophical knowledge of the field as a whole. Moreover, the politics of knowledge production and intellectual conflict are fascinating topics in their own right, particularly for those new to the academy struggling to make sense of their career path and possible trajectories. These issues are sometimes acknowledged in a refreshing fashion (e.g. Shankar and Patterson, 2001, p. 491). What they reveal is that intellectual activity is very much a collective, inter-subjective set of practices (e.g. Bradshaw and Brown, 2009).

While we might well publish independently for a considerable portion of our time, we invariably call upon support and social networks to assist our efforts, to reinvigorate our thinking and push forward our scholarship more effectively than would be possible alone (Cochoy, 2015). The inter-subjective nature of academic life makes it stimulating and yet sometimes so frustrating. It has less welcome attributes as well, with powerful groups able to structure the discursive field so that any critique that questions powerful vested interests (Firat, 2012) passes through the peer review system only when it is “sanitized” or the “critical baggage” is “discarded” (Desmond, 1995, pp. 738, 739). Put slightly differently, in this issue of JHRM we gain insight into the “backstage behaviours of the academy”, particularly with respect to how some scholars were able to successfully promote their vision of marketing and consumer research (Desmond, 1995, p. 736).

Issues of representation and interpretation are often central to the contestation and argumentation surrounding claims to knowledge, human interest and visions of the good society. All of these elements: philosophical reflection, turf wars and academic politics feature throughout each of the papers in this special issue. We gain insight into the relations between realism and critical relativism, the consumer behaviour odyssey, “positivist” research and the recent efforts at providing Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) with meaningful distinction from earlier interpretive research, through to critical scholarship and the postmodern turn. But we get much more than this mere listing of themes indicates. What we see in the contributions by Hunt (2014), Sherry (2014), Belk (2014), Firat (2014) and Kavanagh (2014) in this issue are not just arguments directed at other paradigmatic camps, but the paradigm debates given more flesh and brute empirical realism than has been witnessed outside of the conference circuit (see also Brown, 2012, p. 17).

We examine the intellectual contestation in marketing going back to the earliest alternative perspectives namely those found within the German Historical School (Jones and Monieson, 1990). We follow the discussion of the German Historical School with reference to the emergence of scientific marketing management as exemplified by Percival White who utilises a logical empiricist vocabulary thereby keying into attempts to improve marketing's scientific status (e.g. Coutant, 1937). We then examine the debates that raged in the 1950s around motivation research and explore the contributions of Ernest Dichter and Social Research Incorporated respectively. This allows us to segue into the more recent paradigm debates. Throughout this paper links will be made to each contribution in the special issue. We will weave them throughout this account rather than present them in the traditional paper-by-paper approach in the hope that the links and politics of each twist in marketing discourse will be elucidated.

While it is true that philosophical assumptions were explicitly articulated in the realism and critical relativism debates that took place during the 1980s, reaching institutional recognition – above and beyond a series of conference circuit interactions and roundtables – in the fall 1983 issue of the *Journal of Marketing* (e.g. Anderson, 1983), the recognition of the epistemological assumptions underpinning marketing theory and academic practice has a long pedigree beginning with the German Historical School. Let us begin our exploration of intellectual debate with these scholars.

### **German Historical School**

The idea that it was only with the publication of Converse's (1945) survey of marketing scholars and practitioners about the key contributions and core concepts of marketing that this community adopted a stance of self-reflexivity about the discipline and its impact on wider society is unconvincing. Some of these issues are interrogated by our first contributor, Donncha Kavanagh (2014).

For Jones (1987, 1994) and Jones and Monieson (1990), not only were early scholars aware of various philosophical schools of thought such as classical and neoclassical economics which have typically been assumed to guide marketing theory and thought throughout its early history, they selected otherwise, aligning with the institutionally oriented, German Historical School. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many marketing students spent a portion of their scholarly apprenticeship studying in Germany under the tutelage of academics associated with the German Historical School. Being taught in Germany provided American scholars with an insight into the need to study original source materials wherever possible to provide them with the historical background that was a feature of the work in marketing later conducted at Wisconsin and Harvard alike. They also visited appropriate institutions to see how organisations worked, but perhaps most importantly their foreign education instilled in them a social conscience (Jones, 1987, p. 37).

The point of the visits to organisations was to provide them with accurate descriptions of the workings of the major forces in the economy, gain experience of the operations of these companies so that they could inductively and deductively generate contingent principles that were historically and contextually delimited (i.e. this worldview exhibited temporal and locational relativism), but which could nevertheless guide government intervention and business practice alike. This was a marked departure from classical economic theory which assumed the universality of its theoretical and conceptual presuppositions; it also held an overly individualistic understanding of human behaviour. For the German Historical School there was a definite movement away from individualism and they exhibited much greater concern for the social effects of business on society and sought to contribute to "social welfare" more generally (Jones, 1987, pp. 51-52, 60).

This was a function of the problems facing both Germany and America during the mid to late nineteenth century which had experienced massive industrial growth, but with it came social dislocation, poverty and inequality. Despite the meritocratic ideology accompanying American Exceptionalism, inequality and corruption were the bywords of the period. Richard T. Ely, a key figure at Wisconsin, who displayed a "warm humanitarianism" and a belief that ethics was central to the business disciplines, communicated this ethical axiology through his teaching and promotion of distribution as a focus for dissertation research among his students, many of whom would become – to use Jones' (2012) term –

“pioneers of marketing” (e.g. B.H. Hibbard, Paul Nystrom, Theodore Macklin (Jones, 1987, p.78)). They were encouraged to use their knowledge of history and their empirical research into the workings of the market to solve real world problems, in other words, to make a positive contribution to society, not just, at Wisconsin at least, to business and management.

As Jones (1987, p. 166) underscores, the view that many marketing scholars and educators assume today – that marketing is indebted to economics – neglects to appreciate that it was a particular school of economics teaching and training that oriented the activities of early scholars and this was, in some respects, far removed from the vision of economics that is conjured up when we think of the dismal science today. For at least some of those working in marketing during the early twentieth century “a pluralist-reform ideology” (Jones, 1987, p. 3) motivated their efforts.

But, the translation of the paradigmatic assumptions of the German Historical School when brought back to the U.S. was not monolithic. There were clear differences particularly in terms of the constituents considered the foci for the research being conducted. Scholars at both Harvard and Wisconsin subscribed to a variant of positivism, but which was far less absolutist and more relativistic in terms of the claims that were made regarding the knowledge being produced than Comte’s version. For Harvard, their German Historical heritage would be much more attenuated than Wisconsin on at least one important dimension, namely that of social and distributive justice. This is not to say that there was not a concern for ethics at Harvard. Rather, the invocation of ethics at this institution had more in common with the Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – and a distinctly more pro-managerial agenda than Wisconsin. Both institutions were interested in solving problems but their different constituents, that is, the agricultural industry and farmers and the efficiency of the marketing system as whole at Wisconsin and management and large organisations at Harvard, meant Harvard took a much more firm-level approach to the study of marketing, leading them to pioneer what was effectively a marketing management approach. Wisconsin, on the other hand, took a more macro-level stance asking questions about distributive justice and the effectiveness of the entire economy and who benefitted from its operations when the cost of distribution seemed to be rising at a rate that made many concerned, including government and consumers alike (Jones, 1987, p. 162).

In terms of the way the German Historical axiology was applied in the marketing literature, Jones (1987) cites the work of Paul Nystrom, a famous retailing scholar, which presented a descriptive account of the emergence and growth of the retailing system based on empirical and literature based research. In empirical terms he visited retail establishments, spoke to their managements, and drew from his work with retailers and salesmen as well with students he taught over the years “1909 and 1915” (Jones, 1987, p. 91). As was starting to be typical during this period, Nystrom invoked the ideal of a science of retailing – the definition of which echoes through history, sounding very much like that used by Buzzell (1963) and Hunt (1971) – based on the “organized, systematic treatment of the subject” (Jones, 1987, p. 92).

Kavanagh’s (2014) paper links to the discussion of the German Historical School presented above. He traces the history of early attempts to establish marketing as a science, inserting the pleas for science and scientific method into the wider history of the social sciences and the latter’s much earlier move than marketing towards an extensive use of mathematics in research. Marketing, by contrast, turned towards the behavioural sciences and the symbolism of mathematics much later mainly as a function of the Ford and Carnegie foundations and their reaction to Cold War politics and McCarthyism (Tadajewski, 2006a). But, this is not the main contribution of his paper.

Instead what is important is that he provides a prehistory to the behavioural science revolution, articulating what marketing has lost as a result of the paradigm shift of the 1950s. Explicating Frederick Taylor’s efficiency drives of the turn of the twentieth century, he unpicks how Taylor’s ideas were fed into marketing (see also Skålén et al., 2008; Tadajewski and Jones, 2012). This stream of thought was translated into marketing through various conduits but the scholarly contributions of Hoyt (1913) and White (1927) were among the most important. White’s work on “scientific marketing management” and market research in particular called for scholars to use the insights of various sources – statistics, psychology and sociology, for example. Most importantly for White, though, was that he was trying to translate the ideas of Taylor into

actionable resources for those involved with distribution, sales and market research. As he clarifies the nature of “science” in the preface to *Scientific Marketing Management: Its Principles and Methods*, his magnum opus, he writes:

“THE primary principle of this book is to set forth the principles of modern scientific marketing, as far as it is possible to expound them at this stage of their development. A secondary purpose is to describe a system of marketing for the guidance of individual companies. The undertaking was inspired by Frederick W. Taylor’s books on scientific management. An apology ought, perhaps, to be made for applying the word “scientific” to the system of marketing described and advocated in this book. There are many features that can hardly be called scientific, even in these days when the word “science” is so loosely applied. Its aim, however, is always scientific. The development of procedure is based upon the same principles of efficiency and economy which have been employed in other fields of activity.”

(White, 1927: preface, emphasis in original)

His work was well received in the business press and scholarly marketing and Taylorite literature of the 1920s. A number of his books were hailed as exemplars of excellent scholarly contributions which had in addition practical use. He was also a proponent of what is now known as the marketing concept, arguing that the needs of the customer must come before the needs of production. His wife, Pauline Arnold (1938), made similar arguments but turned them against the consumer movement of the time – led by Chase, Schlink and others – asserting that marketers who cheat and swindle consumers would be swiftly driven out of business.

Throughout his publications White uses the philosophical lexicon that we associate with logical empiricism. He speaks of objectivity, verification, induction, generalisation and deduction among others (e.g. Tadajewski and Jones, 2012, p. 51). These reverberate throughout the history of marketing thought, appearing for instance in the retailing work of Maynard and Beckman (1952) (see Tadajewski et al., 2014). But White (1927) was not the only person calling for or actually drawing from multiple disciplines. Outside of Kavanagh’s purview was the conceptual work of Hazel Kyrk, most notably her *The Theory of Consumption* (1923) which drew from an eclectic range of sources including behaviorism and made gestures to psychoanalytic theory (Tadajewski, 2013). Writing sometime later – most notably in his publications from the 1930s and 1940s – Paul Lazarsfeld (1941) was equally eclectic in his engagement with multiple perspectives (including Critical Theory).

What seemed more important for marketing scholars during the 1920s and 1930s – particularly the latter given the Great Depression and the public viewing business as responsible for the economic and social woes of the time – was securing the legitimacy of their intellectual and practical activities. Coutant (1937, p. 226), for instance, stressed the work of the American Marketing Society “as an organization dedicated to the use of science in marketing”, with the *Journal of Marketing* presented as a vehicle that was the “unquestioned leading publication in scientific marketing” (p. 227). He notes the fact that institutions of higher education were helping promote the vision of scientific marketing that he had in mind, involving “experimental studies” (Coutant, 1936a, p. 108), survey research (Coutant, 1936b, p. 32), “consumer tests”, along with appropriate field-based research, most notably copy-testing of advertising (Coutant, 1936b, p. 32).

Securing and promoting marketing as scientific was, in this context, essentially a means to further the status of marketing and its practitioners in industry (Coutant, 1937, p. 227). Importantly, and as a further blow to the received view that Keith’s (1960) arguments about the marketing concept deserve intellectual pre-eminence, Coutant articulates why good scientific marketing practice was essential during the turbulent 1930s:

“Firms who have sponsored scientific marketing up to this point may be relatively few in number, but the products they sell are familiar names at the top of their fields. The firms who practice modern marketing are the business leaders at the top of their fields. The firms who practice modern marketing are the business leaders of today and tomorrow, for they have learned that customers are the real masters of the market –

those who wish to sell to them must consult their masters' wishes. That is the essence of scientific marketing."

(Coutant, 1937, p. 228)

There were further inflections given to "science" in marketing during the 1930s. In a refrain that sounds remarkably similar to historically important interpretive research (cf. Levy, 1981; Tadjewski, 2006b), recent poststructural and cultural approaches (e.g. Scott, 1994; Stern, 1993, 1996), or the practitioner-oriented material of Ries and Trout (2001), Coutant (1936a, p. 106, 1936b, p. 29) describes Frank Lovejoy's views about markets and marketing in the following way:

"Frank Lovejoy has given us the concept that markets are minds. We used to think of markets as people. But no matter how many people you tell your story to, your market is found only in what goes on in the minds of those people. Most sales managements have learned how to get figures on the population of the territory they call their market, because they can get these free from the Census. Few have yet progressed to the point where they consider it necessary to take the real measurement of the market, in the minds of the people they would like to call customers. Even in this elementary form of marketing science not more than 150 firms were pioneering. Only recently has advanced management learned to think of the scientific study of all the phases of the marketing process."

In spite of Lovejoy's comment about the limited number of firms being scientifically minded, related ideas were spreading through all the available channels.

In his paper Kavanagh (2014) focuses in great detail on the link between the contributions of early scholars whose comments shared a "family resemblance" (Wittgenstein, 1953) with later work by a philosopher and social scientist predicated on practical action to achieve excellence in any given activity (MacIntyre), along with related issues of ethics and common sense (Flyvberg, 2001). These concerns for excellence in practice and ethics are reflected throughout the marketing and related literatures (e.g. in the work of the lawyer, Arthur Jerome Eddy (Eddy, 1912/1915; Tadjewski, 2009). But they are clearly articulated within the literature on correspondence education, particularly the writings of Arthur Frederick Sheldon. Arthur Frederick Sheldon, his correspondence school, as well as his work with the Rotary Club helped to popularise the Golden Rule as an ethical injunction, combined with a discourse of "service to society" (Tadjewski, 2011). For Sheldon, as for UK based sales practitioners (Walker and Child, 1979), being ethical was both the responsibility of the individual, but also good business policy. Treating customers well, offering them appropriate advice, including advice that might dissuade them from buying a given product in the interests of long-term customer relationships was his axiology.

For the moment we will remain with Kavanagh's paper, but partly telescope forward in time to the 1950s, whilst still referring back to seminal scholarship which helps clarify what Kavanagh believes was lost in the movement from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s to the 1950s behavioural science revolution. Our focus will subsequently turn to the second paradigm debate between motivation researchers and their interpretive perspective contrasting these with those associated with logical empiricism as it was read into marketing. Then we explore an alternative reading of how logical empiricism could have been interpreted.

As Kavanagh makes clear in his charting of the research appearing in the 1950s – the period in which science as an institution and label was highly prized (Brown, 1996) – and via his outlining of the epistemological and methodological turn towards mathematical modelling, Kavanagh underlines that marketing has lost something fundamental. It lost a much more explicit ethical orientation which was articulated prominently by practitioners and scholars alike. The axiology of the pursuit of profit as an end for organisational activity was not necessarily the guiding principle of marketer activity; it was of course very important, after all the legal system demands it (Bakan, 2005). Still, early scholars and practitioners were often very clear in their ethics, especially with respect to the Golden Rule and about ensuring that the customer was only sold products that suited their purposes, not just the rubbish the shop owner wanted to clear (White, 1927). White called the latter an exercise in "supersalesmanship" and an "evil" of the industrial world, not to mention bad business practice if the operator wanted to continue in business in the

long-term. Kavanagh illuminates the issue of ethics by way of the arguments of Paul Cherington, the American Marketing Association and industry associations among others.

Within his paper he embeds a reflection on the Hunt-Anderson debate (Kavanagh, 1994) and notes that Paul Anderson's work (1983), while extremely important for the marketing discipline in terms of making a case for the paradigmatic and epistemological pluralisation of marketing theory, also brought its own problems. Specifically, one criticism was that Anderson posits an ideal type of science that was a construction, not an accurate reflection of scientific practice. Secondly, he failed to note the difference between natural and social science, especially the objects they study and how these objects react to being scrutinised. This leads Kavanagh to utilise the work of Bent Flyvbjerg and Alasdair MacIntyre who in different ways stress the importance of practical wisdom and ethical imperatives that should guide human behaviour and social science. These ideas are subsequently used to claim that the writings of practitioners and scholars in the early marketing literature advocated a form of *phronesis*, that is, "a concern for the application of knowledge and skills for social ends" – a view commensurate with the German Historical School. For Kavanagh these ethically minded pioneers in marketing writing in the pre-1958 period (i.e. before the behavioural science turn) whose works peppered the *Journal of Marketing* should be praised for displaying a "critical-ethical" approach (Kavanagh, 2014).

### **Motivation Research and Social Research Incorporated**

Motivation research was highly popular among practitioners and some scholars during the 1930s until around the 1970s when it started to free-fall in terms of its support base (cf. Tadajewski, 2006b). A key figure in this area was Ernest Dichter and essentially his variant of research focused on why people consumed certain products and services, using a variety of methods to bypass the rationalisations that consumers were presumed to offer when speaking to market researchers. These included depth interviewing, thematic association tests and the Rorschach test among many others. As the methods indicate, this paradigm was effectively interpretive in orientation far before interpretive and Consumer Culture Theoreticians entered the marketing lexicon.

The problem was that the nature of interpretation means that people will differ in terms of how they evaluate comments from focus groups, depth interviews and so forth. It is not just academics who look at the world in different ways, disagreeing on research, how it should be conducted and what outcomes are desirable, practitioners are likewise influenced by their biographies and value systems. And as is well known, interpretive and qualitative approaches are often based on small samples – although this was not always the case with motivation research as conducted by Dichter – and each of these factors: the issue of interpretation and subjectivity, the use of small samples, as well as the psychoanalytic associations linked with motivation research, led to a barrage of criticism. Some of this was a function of Dichter's flamboyant style, provocative comments (Tadajewski, 2006b) and "popularity" (Levy, 2006, p. 6); other criticism seemed to be a function of covetousness. He was making a great deal of money through his consultancy work and this led to unwarranted or more forceful critiques than was necessary or appropriate (Newman, 1992). Dichter was, of course, not the only person pursuing an alternative and equally paradigmatically varied agenda during the mid-century.

Social Research Incorporated (SRI) was a cutting edge behavioural science consultancy operating from the mid-1940s until the early 1980s and employed some of the best minds in multiple disciplinary fields, including Sidney Levy – one of the founding figures of interpretive research in marketing and consumer research (Harris, 2007) – and winner of the Maynard award for his Levi-Straussian inspired structuralist analysis of consumer food and eating habits (Levy, 1981). What was impressive about this group of faculty members and students from the University of Chicago was their application of the tenets of anthropology, sociology and psychology to the research needs of business. As Levy (2003, 2006) recalled, it was a period of great stimulation intellectually and interpersonally. Its research provided fundamental insights into branding and the nature of marketing that have defined the parameters to the present day (e.g. the concept of brand image; the idea about the broadening of the domain of marketing (Kotler and Levy, 1969)).



When he recalls the range of companies they conducted research for and the methods SRI mobilised, it is hard not to be impressed:

“...I was soon immersed in analyzing projective tests of managerial personnel for some companies and interpreting consumer reactions to products and marketing communications for an array of advertising agencies and their clients... We lived SRI from breakfast until bedtime, brooding over methods of data-gathering and seeking penetrating insights... Almost all of our research was custom designed, with instruments created to study the qualitative kinds of problems in which we came to specialize. The basic approach was the so-called depth interview, a free-style conversational method in which the interviewees encouraged respondents to talk fully and express themselves freely. Within this more or less non-directive approach, we embedded various projective devices... We invented devices such as matching people, animals, cars, pictorial symbols, and soliciting dreams... We took pictures of people’s houses and living rooms, we sent interviewers to spend whole days observing and making detailed notes on what respondents did.”

(Levy, 2003, p. 101; see also Levy, 2012, p. 9)

For the marketing discipline, though, the conditions of possibility for the promotion of interpretive, qualitative or symbolic analysis were not available at this time. University departments were often unwilling to hire staff with these particular skill-sets – a pattern that continues to the present day in the United States according to Levy (2005, p. 7). The reluctance was far greater during the 1950s and 1960s, however, when the definition of marketing science did not include research that did not conform to the norm of the hypothetico-deductive method, with concomitant large samples, experimental testing which could be translated or interpreted through some form of mathematical or statistical technique. This turn was buttressed by the Marketing Science Institute and other major players in intellectual politics like the Ford Foundation (Brown, 1996; Tadajewski, 2006a).

Arguably, the movement of marketing towards the behavioural sciences and the shift to a managerial interpretation of the role of marketing as a firm-level, profit-producing practice and disciplinary project was accompanied by a decline in the criticism of marketing and its theoretical and conceptual architecture within the discipline. The socially oriented approaches of the German Historical School and the call to ethical practice was by now subsumed by a managerial perspective first stressed by the Harvard Business School in what can be called – following Jones (1987) and Jones and Monieson (1990) – the first paradigm debate. As Kangun wrote during the early 1970s:

“Although marketing departments are concerned with educating tomorrow’s leaders, they do not seem to impress upon students the need to think greatly of their function, because serious self-criticism of marketing philosophies, policies and actions is frequently avoided in the discipline. Yet constructive self-criticism is important if great thought is to flourish in marketing.”

(Kangun, 1972, p. xiii)

Of course, it could be countered that social marketing represented a critical move on behalf of the academy. An alternative perspective might see it as an intellectual land grab, with marketing seeking out new areas in order to advance its social credentials in the face of accusations that it formed part of the military-industrial establishment (Kassarjian and Goodstein, 2010). Luck (1972, p. 403), for example, believed the broadening of marketing simply represented the “imperial drive” (Monieson, 1988) of the marketing concept into new areas.

Most of the above scholars saw some value in broadening marketing, but it was set in terms of the paradigmatic expansion of the discipline, not simply the extension of marketing into new areas. The late 1970s, early 1980s saw the philosophical pluralism that scholars desired begin to emerge. The hedonistic consumer and critical marketing are both mentioned within scholarly circles during this period (Tadajewski, 2010a, 2010b), with debates starting to simmer regarding the appropriate philosophical assumptions for marketing theory.

## Positivism, Scientific Realism and Relativism

The more recent paradigm debates that took place during the 1980s and 1990s have now attained an almost iconic status; most marketing scholars watched with fascination the interactions between Hunt, Olson, Peter, Anderson, Arndt and many others (e.g. Arndt, 1985a, 1985b). In his paper in this issue Shelby Hunt effectively provides a doctoral level reading list for students and academics alike who are interested in the differences between the various worldviews that were delineated.

Hunt is careful to stress that the seven publications he lists are those that he considers important. There are alternative ways of reviewing and understanding the debates Hunt discusses and Belk (2014), Sherry (2014), Kavanagh (2014) and Firat (2014) offer alternatives that capture the “heated” (Brownlie and Saren, 1995) and “bitter” (Brown, 1999) nature of the philosophical debates of the 1980s and 1990s. One might, for example, have liked to have seen the postmodernist extension of the relativist position appear somewhere in Hunt’s list given that it has been described as a “heavily armed combatant” in the “battle” of the paradigm debate during the 1990s (Brown, 1999, p. 44).

Briefly, the papers within Hunt’s purview include a number of his monographs on the relationship between the philosophy of science and marketing which have been popular among those interested in these issues; an important panel discussion at an American Marketing Association conference from 1982; the 1983 issue of the *Journal of Marketing* in which a number of seminal papers appeared (e.g. Anderson, 1983; Peter and Olson, 1983); a comment by a philosopher on Paul Anderson’s work as well as Anderson’s (critical relativistic) response to the evaluation of his scholarship by a realist philosopher; the three articles Hunt published on “truth, positivism, and objectivity”, and, finally, a piece from the *European Journal of Marketing*.

While Hunt gestures at many different traditions within this carefully crafted work, others have contested some of the arguments he marshals through these papers (e.g. Brown, 1999, pp. 44-47; Brown, 2005, pp. 85-114), particularly the proposition that there is no dominant paradigm in marketing and consumer research. This is not quite the same as there not being limits on what counts as a contribution to marketing theory. There are power relations operating in the marketing academy: individuals from more prestigious institutions are likely to be considered to possess more “source credibility” (Firat, 2014) than those from lesser institutions; taking a Marxist or Critical Theory approach which argues that marketing – as the motor of capitalism – seeks to exploit consumers rather than satisfy them (e.g. Benton, 1987) is likely to be problematised and not writing in a way to appeal to North American audiences is deemed equally questionable (e.g. Bradshaw and Dholakia, 2012, pp. 120-121). All of these points raise questions about the objectivity operative in the academy. Indeed, one need not be a card-carrying Marxist (Brownlie, 2006) to run into the barriers presented by “invisible colleges” (Crane, 1972). As Levy (2006, pp. 7-8) underlines, “Dominant paradigm people often resist, [and] show hostility... They are defensive, unrealistically acting as though their livelihoods are jeopardized by the projective techniques and ethnographies that they imagine will replace their surveys, regressions and multivariate methods.”

Arguably, then, there is a definite framing mechanism operating in marketing theory and consumer research. As Brown (2005, p.105) puts it, much of our research exhibits a commitment “to what Agger calls ‘Midwestern Empiricism’ – the hypothetico, quantificatory, varimaxed, conjoined, Lisrelised, experimentissimo, big-science-or-bust mindset” (see also Brown, 1999, p. 45). We should also register the biases in our samples towards literate, western, white, middle classes (Adkins and Ozanne, 2005; Burton, 2009; Engel, 1985; Hirschman, 1993; Varman and Saha, 2009). Furthermore, if we hold, like Foucault, that to think in philosophical terms is to register the limits of existing patterns of thought (Schwartz, 1998), then we cannot avoid engaging with alternative perspectives including interpretive and Consumer Culture Theoretics (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Levy, 1981; Thompson et al., 2013), humanist (Hirschman, 1986), feminist (e.g. Bristor and Fischer, 1993, 1995; Catterall et al., 2005; Hirschman, 1993), critical theoretic (e.g. Alvesson, 1993; Murray and Ozanne, 1991), postmodernist (Bouchet, 1994; Brown, 1998; Firat and Dholakia, 2006; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), postmodernist-communist (Cova et al., 2013), whiteness theory (Burton, 2009), critical marketing studies (e.g. Tadajewski, 2010; Moufahim and

Chatzidakis, 2012; Moufahim and Lim, 2009) and postcolonial contributions (e.g. Bonsu, 2009; Jack, 2008). Clearly, not all perspectives will appeal to all members of the academy, but we must nevertheless appreciate the varied “scientific styles” available (Hirschman, 1985).

Hunt, of course, is a prominent proponent of scientific realism – a position he has fleshed out over the last thirty years (e.g. Hunt, 1982, 2002, 2003) which uses the language of truth, realism and objectivity as its watchwords; whereas Anderson (1986, 1988) subscribed to critical relativism whose core revolved round the notion that the pursuit of science was bounded by a weak form of paradigm incommensurability. Effectively, this latter point underscored the argument that people who adopt different perspectives are likely to disagree about important problems (see also Hunt, 2001, 2010), as well as the core concepts they use to frame and interpret, for example, the consumer (i.e. the original “cold” version of the information processing perspective articulated by James Bettman versus those adopting more anthropologically oriented research aligned with the consumer behaviour odyssey).

In his account of the seven key publications of this period, Hunt provides us with an insight into these debates from his perspective. He illuminates what led him to closer study of the history and philosophy of science, explaining the genesis of many of his contributions, as well as reviewing the contributions of those with whom he engaged in scholarly debate. Hunt has challenged marketing academics to be more historically and philosophically literate, particularly when they make claims about dominant paradigms or logical empiricism. He expresses his own philosophical commitments, charting their development from “an eclectic blend of logical empiricism and realism” through to his more explicit scientific realist stance. This point of differentiation is an important one for Hunt is often taken as an exemplar of some variant of positivism. Perhaps it is easy to want to label someone in this way – it provides a target for critical analysis and a means of differentiation for those who pursue alternative intellectual paths. Let us explore this point a little further by re-reading the history of logical empiricism.

### **Logical Empiricism, Neurath and Socialism**

Logical empiricism is often treated much like a weasel word (Brown, 2005) or equated with the ontological and epistemological commitments of Hunt. Neither of these are appropriate ways of understanding this complex school of philosophical thought. Since the commitments of the early logical empiricists continue to be explored by historians and philosophers of science, their internal variety and points of difference are being appreciated, as well as the linkages of this work with contemporary strands of critical and social theory, most notably the work of Foucault and Habermas (e.g. Tadjewski, 2010b).

As Cartwright et al (1996) and others have made clear, the political commitments of some of the early logical empiricists were consistent with socialism and their research was viewed as furthering social improvement and emancipation. Otto Neurath (1882-1945), one of the major figures in this movement, distanced himself from the term “positivism” in favour of logical empiricism as he considered the position of Comte to be “a very absolutistic doctrine” and he preferred to consider philosophical and scientific practice in much more pluralistic terms (Neurath in Faludi, 1989, p. 415).

Importantly, Neurath’s writing and actual practice reflected his belief that philosophical and political activities were firmly entwined. He registered that knowledge production was permeated by politics and appreciated that conventionalism guided what counted as a valid contribution to a given discipline (Faludi, 1989; Zemplén, 2006). Moreover, his epistemological commitments to physicalism (i.e. science starts with empirical observations, exploring how any given phenomena changes over time); anti-foundationalism (i.e. the issue of values in science); underdetermination (i.e. empirical evidence will never completely justify our beliefs, there will always be other interpretations that can be discussed); the conceptual structuring of reality; scientific voluntarism (i.e. he underscored the role of conventionalism and researcher involvement in choosing a given topic) and his belief that there is no single scientific method, all bring him reasonably close to the paradigmatic commitments of post-structuralist and critical theoretic perspectives in circulation today (Okruhlik, 1998).

As he hoped to make clear in his writing, Neurath welcomed social scientists with a commitment to emancipation. This point brings his work into closer alignment with the Frankfurt School in the sense that Neurath was not interested in his vision of the scientific enterprise reaffirming the status-quo, he wanted it to challenge the existing organisation of society in order to improve the life-experiences and chances of the mass of society. Philosophical reflection and scientific action should thus work against exploitation – exploitation that “traditional theory” served. For Bowie (2000, p. 282) “Neurath was in fact at least as critical of the repressive manifestations of modern capitalism as Horkheimer, and was often a very effective agent in helping bring about progressive social transformation” (Bowie, 2000, p. 282; see also Zemplén, 2006).

His stance towards the world has been described as an example of “critical optimism” (Kinross, 1984). He was willing to scrutinise philosophy, sociology and economics as well as the existing organisation of his own economic system, with a view to diagnosing problems and providing action oriented solutions. Reflecting this, he was interested in the socialist planning of the economy, served in government, was active in the movement for better housing in Vienna and entered into debates with prominent architects and their professional associations about what types of housing were required by the people who might actually inhabit them. In a characteristically blunt fashion, Neurath expressed the view that “people do not seem to want to live in houses that look like ships” and that the “guiding” criterion for any intervention in society should be “human happiness” (Kinross, 1984, p. 195).

Much in line with the issues of communication and trust indicated as important, albeit fraught with difficulties, by Hunt, Anderson or Habermas for that matter, Neurath positioned the issue of communication and “negotiation” as central to all scientific praxis (Okruhlik, 1998). It is only through communication and a willingness to try to understand the positions of others that science will progress (Bowie, 2000). It is this inter-subjective debate that makes for objectivity in science, Neurath claimed. It is this debate and willingness to engage with others that makes it possible to “orchestrate” the efforts of those involved in knowledge production with a view to solving social and societal ills (Kinross, 1984). The orchestration element of the vision for a project of “unified science” that Neurath had in mind was to be an example of the interdisciplinary and dialogic type of scientific activity that stressed shared commitments by knowledge producers over those of paradigmatic divergences.

To help foster human happiness and improve the accountability of those in power, he was involved with a variety of public-facing educational endeavours that were intended to make economic and sociological information accessible to those with limited literacy, education and irrespective of cultural differences. One of the most prominent was a result of his role in the development of ISOTYPE (International System of Typographical Picture Education) which translated data into visual images that were standardised and simple to understand. Kinross (1984) describes the images as “child-like”. His vision for the dissemination of these resources was bold: he wanted to produce and distribute them wherever they were needed. The United States welcomed his work and ideas which were commissioned by the National Tuberculosis Association of America, as well as by various publishers.

Neurath’s work did not thus reflect complacency about the current economic, social and cultural system. Rather it was underwritten by a positive conception of human behaviour and the possibility for social change that would result from generalised “social enlightenment” (Kinross, 1984). Unfortunately, Neurath died at a relatively young age, and the vision of logical empiricism that he developed and refined was not the same as the one which landed on American shores or has been incorporated into the history and philosophy of marketing thought, which stresses the ahistorical, apolitical interpretation of logical empiricism more associated with Carnap than with Neurath (see McCumber, 1996).

This re-reading suggests that there are more shared commitments among scholars than we often fully appreciate. Registering these and trying to understand the positions of our peers is thus perfectly possible, if demanding in terms of intellectual energy and time (see Hunt, 2001, 2010). So, whilst registering the politics of knowledge and the peer review system, it is apparent that the framing mechanisms operative in the academy are not immutable, they can and must be reconsidered if the discipline is to advance:

“The rules of the game can be and are broken. Invention is as important as convention. As a trawl through the back issues of JM, JMR, JCR, JAMS or whatever clearly testifies...the current contents of Category One marketing publications are markedly different from those of 30 years ago. Almost without exception the papers are much longer, more rigorous methodologically, more sophisticated philosophically and more citation strewn than before...Nevertheless, it is important to appreciate that however widespread this sense of ennui and stasis, no matter how degenerate – in Lakatosian terms – a research programme becomes, regardless of currents and turbulence in the prevailing intellectual climate, significant change cannot be divorced from the politics of publishing, the peer review system in particular.”

(Brown, 1995, p. 691)

These are ideas shared by many of the contributors to this issue. Belk (2014), Sherry (2014) and Firat (2014) all have participated in research groups that have sought to change the intellectual structure and vision of the academy, many of them attempting to establish alternative institutional publishing and conference ventures for those outside of the mainstream.

### **Weakly Incommensurable Paradigms**

While the Hunt-Anderson debates were often at a fairly high level of abstraction, reading the papers in this issue, combined with knowledge of the arguments that featured in these debates, provides flesh to philosophical issues as they apply to marketing and consumer research. So, while it may indeed be true that Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1996) moved away from a strong version of his incommensurability thesis, that is, the idea that different research traditions or worldviews cannot be compared on a point-by-point basis or necessarily adjudicated definitively (e.g. Tadjewski, 2008), his arguments about different communities exhibiting sometimes marked differences of interpretation still resonates with the contributions in this issue.

As such, we see Hunt and Belk differ in terms of their interpretations of the major debates and how they could have been resolved during the 1980s and 1990s, most notably in terms of the mobilisation of the criteria associated with naturalistic inquiry. Hunt views the adoption of what Belk and others (e.g. Shankar and Patterson, 2001) label as quasi-positivistic criteria for determining the trustworthiness of any particular interpretive account in positive terms. While Belk, and those aligned with interpretive and Consumer Culture Theoretics, are more inclined to register the political expediency in their adoption of justification methods likely to appeal to mainstream scholars. Taking this point further, Firat (2014) asks us why we would expect the politics of knowledge production to be anything less than structured in ways that conform most closely with criteria deemed desirable by the larger communities in the discipline whose research interests and key assumptions run parallel to those derived from the axiology of consumer research sketched out by Hirschman (1990), Burton (2009) and Brown (1999, 2005). There are, after all, examples of scholars saying they deliberately avoid certain strands of critical thought – notably associated with Critical Theory – in literature reviews engaging in critiques of advertising (see Desmond, 1995, p. 739).

Political expediency, then, is a key issue for scholars and we use it here to mean adopting the lexicon and reasonably similar “scientific styles” to those of journal editors and reviewers to enhance the chance that research will successfully negotiate the peer review system. Indeed, while it is difficult not to have sympathy for Hunt’s (2014) plea for objectivity in marketing research, the idea that we market the knowledge products that we produce (e.g. Hunt and Edison, 1995) and consequently appeal to the worldview and belief systems of those who can decide whether we publish or perish, means that we deny the politics of knowledge production at our peril (e.g. Brownlie and Saren, 1995, p. 623; Wittink, 2004, p. 3; Polonsky, 2008, p. 407).

### **The Politics of Knowledge Production**

An instance of the politics of knowledge production can be witnessed by contrasting Hunt’s (2014) contribution with that offered by Firat (2014). Hunt expresses his desire for scholarly inquiry to be underpinned by “academic civility”, a regard for the intellectual sincerity of those within the academic community, combined with careful attention to their arguments and reflections; whereas Firat offers us an instance of academic representation that does not sit comfortably with those values Hunt wishes to see

central to objective inquiry in marketing. For Firat, the misrepresentation of his work by those who adopted an alternative paradigmatic stance was compounded by the closure of the channels of intellectual communication by an editor whose interest in undistorted communication appears lacking.

Clearly the case described by Firat is troubling. It is not, however, unusual in either the natural or social sciences. The structure of intellectual activity is generally marked by “acrimony” (Brown, 1995; Collins, 2002; Sheth, 1992). As Brown (2012, p.17) points out, “hard scientists have never been averse to fiddling and fudging their facts and figures. The brand image of science...is predicated on logic, rigour, trust, honesty, dependability and gentlemanly conduct. But the reality is quite the opposite” (cf. *The Guardian*, 2014). In addition, we have probably all experienced a sense of disorientation when we see how others have interpreted our work. Admittedly, given knowledge of polysemy should we be surprised by such readings (cf. Brown, 2005, pp. 104-105)? Probably not.

Perhaps all this indicates is that we are not neutral when we approach other people’s writing, research and publications (Brown, 2012). Our evaluation is further shaped by the fact that we do not all share the same image and assumed function of marketing and consumer research (e.g. Holbrook, 1985) and this will have implications for the contributions we deem desirable and as furthering disciplinary agendas (Brown, 1995, 1998). We can say, therefore, that central to the debates from the early twentieth century through to the present day have been the related issues of power relations and resistances (Moisander et al., 2009). As Kuhn (1962, 1996), Feyerabend (1975) and Brown (2012) register, alternative perspectives that compete for academic power and influence and succeed in establishing a power base can themselves become intellectually oppressive:

“Loudly denouncing the old order, the old methods, the old concepts, the old paradigms, the old ways of doing things is a time-tested technique of *avant garde* self-promotion. However, demands for radical reform merely trigger resistance, hostility, mutual suspicion and, when the dust finally settles, a *de facto* disciplinary schism. The cycle repeats itself when the new guard become the old guard, as they invariably do. Marketing’s interpretive paradigm – latterly rebranded CCT...is a perfect case in point.”

(Brown, 2012, p. 12)

This is not to say interpretive or CCT research has an easy time in the halls of academia. Belk’s (2014) paper highlights the trials and tribulations of marshalling the resources to undertake an event that has truly assumed seminal status in the discipline, the consumer behaviour odyssey. His paper is particularly notable in terms of underscoring the lengths they went to in order to secure data, learning new methods, forms of analysis and the use of advanced – if cumbersome – technology. What it also highlights especially well is the way academics can inspire each other to improve their own understandings and skills. Put simply, it reminds us that sometimes we do our best work when working alongside another equally motivated scholar or twenty.

As Belk reveals, the history of marketing thought is nothing if not subject to contestation as regards the positioning of our own contributions and those of others. His paper provides an insight into these dynamics. It does this not only in terms of the relationship between the emergent interpretive community and the Carnapian logical empiricist orientation of much marketing thought, but also the relationship between interpretive research and CCT. What comes through in Belk’s (2014) manuscript is that while this label has no doubt formed an important branding strategy, there is internal disagreement within the community of scholars that label themselves as participating in the CCT project. Clearly there is much continuity in the scholarship in the interpretive and CCT camps. Equally, it is hard to shake off a perception that the movement from interpretive research and the many diverse traditions that this entailed (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) to the CCT label actually represents less a welcoming of a variety of ways of “seeking knowledge” (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) and more a funnelling of thought through a particular prism with less deviation permitted. Like other communities before it, to practice CCT related research, one has to adopt a particular discursive strategy, citing a similar range of previous publications, irrespective of how tenuous the links are to the current work.

## Pragmatism and the Marketing Discipline

Pragmatism, however, is another feature of academic labour and the personal accounts presented in this special issue detail the reasons why some of the contributors moved into the marketing discipline when their training and desires might have led them elsewhere. People have to take the available work options that present themselves at any given time in order to feed their families and pay their mortgages and these issues feature in the papers by Firat (2014) and Sherry (2014). Both scholars were critical of the business system, seeking to understand how it helped constitute and constrain the life-world experiences of large swathes of the population.

For Sherry, his ethnographic sensitivities and seemingly high tolerance for risk in terms of his enrolment with the consumer behaviour odyssey at an early stage in his career (see also Belk, 2014) have led to a career path that has rode the intellectual waves of interpretive research and Consumer Culture Theory. Sherry's contribution to this issue is important, since like Belk's article, it illuminates the roles performed by scholars in terms of forwarding alternative forms of consumer research. These included Joel Cohen, Jim Bettman, Hal Kassarian and Richard Lutz. With Sidney Levy, Morris Holbrook, Beth Hirschman, Julie Ozanne, Paul Anderson, Fuat Firat, Alladi Venkatesh, Nik Dholakia, Russell Belk and Melanie Wallendorf among a much larger cast, Hal Kassarian figures prominently in both Sherry's and Belk's reflections as supportive of novel forms of consumer research. Kassarian's institutional stature helped access funding support and the legitimization conferred by association with the Marketing Science Institute and affluent advertising agencies (e.g. Belk, 2014; Moisander et al., 2009). In addition, he was a vocal supporter of radical thought in marketing as exemplified by his positive review (Kassarian, 1989) of Firat et al's (1987) influential – in Europe and Asia (Firat, 2014) text – *Philosophical and Radical Thought in Marketing*.

According to Sherry, Cohen hired him explicitly as a way of pushing forward the boundaries of consumer research by incorporating an anthropological edge; the others (e.g. Lutz) performed important institutional and gatekeeping roles that recognised the merit of paradigmatic pluralism and supported alternative forms of inquiry. As he notes in an earlier reflection on the role of the consumer behaviour odyssey, the main benefits of this project were intellectual self-development for the participants concerned as well as institutional expansion:

“The creation of a research culture and a consumer franchise to speed acceptance of naturalistic inquiry into consumer research is among the most significant of the Odyssey's achievements. A larger critical mass of naturalistic inquirers and an audience more receptive to postpositivist methodology has been generated through the project. The establishment of an archive to house and circulate data collected during the Odyssey is another major contribution of the project.”

(Sherry, 1987, p. 371)

In spite of this institution building, Sherry's account of the future for consumer research is not necessarily a rosy one. As he puts it, “The tribes of marketing can be insular and clannish, with hermetic local interests reinforced by tenure and promotion standards as well as by professional society affiliations” (Sherry, 2014). This is a very important point that scholars should appreciate for a variety of reasons including peer support, publication options and the structuring of careers. With respect to peer support, scholars and practitioners alike need to identify those with whom they can work. And while it might be sensible advice to avoid critical or unusual approaches in studying marketing and consumption phenomena until tenure has been secured (e.g. Holbrook, 1995), the danger is that by that stage a scholar's identity is so tightly linked to their doctoral research and early publications that changing career path, paradigmatic affiliations and research focus can be difficult.

Our next contributor's work has been subject to a degree of misreading and misunderstanding and too often quickly and mistakenly tied to a celebratory postmodernism which valorises the use and mobilisation of the resources provided by the marketplace in consumer identity projects. More attentive readers will, however, have appreciated the distance that Firat has historically displayed and continues to display from any uncritical lauding of consumer agency and freedom. As one of the most prominent

alternative thinkers in the marketing academy, his own respective and co-authored publications have displayed an acute sensitivity to the socio-historical structuring of consumption choices (e.g. Firat, 1978, 1987).

Reading the Firat and Venkatesh (1995) *Journal of Consumer Research* paper, for instance, underlines repeatedly that what they are producing is a sketch of the implications of postmodern thought for marketing and that it should not be assumed to represent the way the marketing system is structured in the present nor necessarily a comprehensive version of what any marketplace in the near future might look like. They are far more circumspect than is generally noted, stressing on-going asymmetrical power relations between marketplace participants and this should not be a surprise given their intellectual backgrounds and sympathies.

The paper by Fuat Firat that appears in this special issue sheds light on the politicised background of this major contributor to critical, radical and postmodern perspectives in marketing, but also – as ever – the importance of some element of pragmatism in career choice. This scholar had initially planned to pursue a career in macroeconomics. Positions were, however, unavailable. This was fortuitous. In quite a critical theoretic vein, as Firat explains, the market has seeped into most facets of human existence (see also Leiss, 1974). This makes marketing a potentially fundamental discipline for those seeking to be self-reflexive about the many factors – economic, symbolic and material – which weigh upon them in their everyday lives.

Understanding the multifarious impacts of the market and marketing practice upon human subjectivity is at the core of Firat's individually published and collaborative work. As he explains, his focus on the processes by which marketing helps pattern human existence owes a debt to his readings of key Marxist, Neo-Marxist, social constructionist and postmodern theory. Whether or not one is necessarily conversant with these traditions, what will become clear to all readers is the desire and appreciation for learning that this manuscript displays. What is less frequently registered were the challenges that Firat as a young doctoral student levelled at the discipline and the risk in doing so, despite the supportive intellectual environment he occupied at Northwestern which Sherry (2014) describes as “a Marketing Department that treated the field as an interdisciplinary playground”.

As Firat explains, the ideas that resulted in his doctoral thesis on the social structuring of consumption were presented – when he was a second year student – during a seminar series for faculty members in which they discussed their current projects with colleagues. He was told his ideas would not make a suitable contribution to marketing. This would be enough to shake the confidence of all but the most independent. Being told this by Philip Kotler would probably cause a good percentage of the rest to stall in their thinking. For Firat, this was the stimulus he needed to pursue the idea with scholarly vigour.

This willingness to challenge the discipline and expand its boundaries so that it more closely approximates the social – rather than behavioural-managerial – sciences is a theme which reverberates in his academic writing but is also embedded in his book editing projects, journal work and institution building via conference organisation. Even so, despite the detail of the paper, it is worth exploring his earliest intellectual contributions to fully appreciate the axiological and epistemological boundaries that remain extant in marketing theory and thought.

Unusually for a marketing scholar, Firat (1978, 2014) references Marx and demonstrates an ability to deploy a range of critical thinkers throughout his research (e.g. Althusser, Caplovitz, Galbraith, Baran and so forth). His doctoral dissertation, in addition, remains a foundational text for critical marketing studies that deserves much wider circulation and citation. As Levy (1981) remarked in his Maynard prize winning paper, Firat's dissertation was an important contribution to the literature, but which remained difficult to translate into the expected journal articles. His thesis was a critique of the managerial and technological orientation of marketing as a discipline. His criticism was that this reduced the vision and contributions made possible by virtue of disciplinary boundaries and interests. Studying brand choice was an appropriate topic for scholarly inquiry, but the factors that led to brand choices, that is, how the need for a given product category was actually fostered and stimulated were not considered within marketing's intellectual orbit.



Firat's thesis is nothing if not both brave and forthright. Brave in the sense that he frames his thesis in terms that echo Althusser (who is cited by Firat) as a clear "epistemological break" from received wisdom in marketing. It is a break in the sense that he is challenging marketing and consumer behaviour research on multiple fronts. Firstly, he is critical of the micro-level (and individualistic) focus of the specialism – a criticism that has been reaffirmed by those seeking to challenge existential-phenomenology specifically (Askegaard and Linnet, 2011) and consumer research more generally (Moisander et al., 2009). This criticism translates into concrete arguments about the need to study the structuring of consumption patterns, such as how our "need" for any given practice (e.g. transportation) is fostered and encouraged (and indeed, denied).

Put in slightly different terms, he is asking marketing scholars to move away from an assumption that remains common in marketing textbooks, namely that needs are innate to the individual, rather than fostered through patterns of socialisation and interaction. This means he also calls into question the logic of the marketing concept and the related (but problematically related) issue of consumer sovereignty (see Dixon, 1992/2008). His citation patterns, style of argumentation and willingness to question core assumptions and values, led some readers of his work to interpret it as a Marxist analysis – a style of critique likely to evoke any number of overt and more hidden challenges. In this case, these challenges manifested in difficulties securing access to publication channels.

For Firat, this reflects the continued presence of classical economics within marketing thought, specifically within the discipline of consumer behaviour. Obviously, marketing's intellectual heritage is complex and could have taken many alternative turns (e.g. Jones and Monieson, 1990) and marketing thought is not solely indebted to economics. Yet even its invocation of psychology reflects a cognitive, highly individualistic, rationalistic formulation. Firat's contribution is to ask about the formation of needs that eschews a focus on the individual consumer:

"...we do not accept needs as given in the process of formation and transformation of consumption patterns. Neither do we accept the premise that needs are the outcome of internal processes in man, either psychological or biological. Instead, we treat needs as a problem to be understood – i.e., how do needs develop and change? We do not readily and without scepticism accept the classical assumption that economic activity and organization in society are results of an urge on the part of man to satisfy his consumption needs and that, therefore, the motivating force in an economy are the needs of man. We assume needs to be subject to change according to the changes in man's social, economic and political environment, and try to explain the reasons and basic relationships in this change (Firat, 1978, p. 17)."

Certainly, it is hard not to agree with him that attention should be directed to the shaping of consumption patterns, that is, with the how of consumption – how certain needs take the shape they do and how they are recognised as important and relevant to many different groups of consumers. These ideas feed into his work on postmodernism. This label might signal to many that he has moved away from his concerns with structure and structuration processes to a more agentic view. Such a perception is understandable, but incorrect. It is based more on a reading of the title of the prize winning JCR paper that he co-authored with Venkatesh than on a close reading of the manuscript which reveals an on-going view that a world in which people can access the market equally is still to come (see also Firat, 2005, p. 218). Asymmetric power relations, bureaucracy, market-making powerful organisations are still with us and are not likely to disappear in the near future (e.g. Calhoun, 1993). The market does not provide all people with the resources they require and exploits others, and Firat and Venkatesh refer to the way the marketing system dominates consumers (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The liberated consumer was thus an ideal, not a present reality (cf. Miles, 2000), but they hold out hope for social change, yet remain aware that this is unlikely to happen soon. Firat's views in this respect were made clear in an exchange with Bernard Cova, a one-time passionate advocate of affirmative postmodernism. As Firat puts it in a 2005 paper which echoes his 1978 thesis and has been fleshed out further more recently (see Atik and Firat, 2013):

"I see the very large majority of consumers' symbols and meanings to be guided by market(ing) forces. Who are those consumers' who can play with symbols and meanings in the culture except a few who are, in fact, cultural producers, such as music icons, certain artists and celebrities, behind

whom usually lurk major corporate marketing efforts? Few and far between are examples of some consumption collectives (also called by others, communities or neo-tribes) where indeed novel meanings and symbols have been generated... The alternatives to choose from... still remain to be largely determined by a system of corporate evaluation of profitable market possibilities, which in turn are largely guided by corporate technology choices, corporate media programming, and actions of certain powerful and highly visible consumer units. Any development outside of this cycle is indeed minimal (Firat, 2005, pp. 217-218)".

So, while Firat is an avid reader of the postmodern literature and well known for the tentative postmodern themes he sketched out (i.e. "hyperreality, fragmentation, reversal of production and consumption, decentered subject and juxtaposition of opposites" (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995, p. 252)), as he makes clear in his paper these were neither meant to be the defining prism through which we should understand postmodernism, nor taken to reflect present reality. Yet many scholars have done just that and so arguably Miles' (2000) contention that postmodern theory has seduced scholars holds some weight. An alternative reading is possible and that is Firat and Venkatesh's (1995) work on postmodernism has suffered its own postmodern condition. After all, one of the aspects of postmodernism that Brown (1999, p. 33) highlights is a sense of intellectual "exhaustion" and "stagnation". So, when Firat comments that he cringes when people talk excitedly about how he has defined postmodernism for them, he has to realise that he has now experienced another aspect of postmodernism for himself.

But, of course, no scholar stands still for long in this "publish or perish" climate. And a close reader of Firat's (2014) contribution to this issue in conjunction with his other recent work will note that his position is returning, if not becoming stronger, to that of his 1978 Ph.D. work, albeit in much more developed terms. He is vociferous in asserting the power of the market as a structuring force. He calls it "hegemonic" and marketing its institutionalised mechanism carrying market-produced values into all facets of human existence. In doing so he invokes the spirit of Veblen when he refers to "vested interests" in the form of the modern corporation. More than this "it constructs the complex of desire... and its means for diffusion and execution" (Firat, 2013, p. 201). All of which suggests that we should be wary of pigeonholing scholars too quickly.

To bring this article to a close, since Hunt's manuscript was a stimulus for this special issue, it is perhaps only appropriate that we end on a quote from him that not only fits well with the specialism of this Journal and the topical focus of this special issue, but moreover is likely to be a point on which all authors in this issue will concur: "the fact that all marketing research projects have philosophical foundations is that there will always be differences among marketing researchers as to the most appropriate philosophy for guiding research. Therefore, in a very fundamental sense, marketing's philosophy debates will never be over" (Hunt, 2014).

## Conclusion

This paper has engaged with the paradigm debates in marketing theory and practice. It has taken a broad historical perspective charting the ebbs and flows of reflection on issues like ontology, epistemology and the conceptualisation of the consumer. What this material underscores is that intellectual debate is not solely limited by the search for knowledge and truth, but also deeply political and inter-subjective in nature. These debates have been illuminated and linked to the contents of the special issue. This further contextualises the debates that have taken place and renders the links clear for the reader.

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